**Argument Essay**

David Warlick, educator, author, and public speaker states, “We need technology in every classroom and in every student and teacher’s hand, because it is the pen and paper of our time, and it is the lens through which we experience much of our world.”

However, Matthew Lynch, a Professor of Education at Virginia Union University, points out that technology in schools isn’t always beneficial: “From a young age, students learn that answers exist at their fingertips through search engines and expert websites. It is more efficient to just look up the answers through the hard work someone else has already done than to find the answers on their own.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the use of technology in schools.

**Synthesis Essay**

**Directions**: The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources, you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. *Your argument should be central; the sources should support your argument. Avoid merely summarizing the sources.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect references.

**Introduction**

Much attention has been given lately to the ubiquitous presence of information technologies. Our daily lives seem to be saturated with television, computers, cell phones, and tablets.

Many people extol the ability of such technologies to provide easy access to information and facilitate research and learning. At the same time, however, some critics worry that the widespread use of information technologies forces our lives to move too quickly. We encounter images and information from the Internet and other sources faster than we can process or evaluate them, and even though electronic communication has been enhanced, both the quality and quantity of face-to-face interaction is changing.

**Assignment**

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source.

Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops your position on the use of technology in schools.

You may refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Walden)

Source B (Lynch)

Source C (Nagel)

Source D (Johnson)

Source E (Wexler)

Source F (cartoon)

**Source A**

“Top Five Benefits of Technology in the Classroom.” Walden University. Web. Accessed 10 Jan. 2020.

*The following is excerpted from a university’s education program website.*

Technology has transformed life as we know it, and the classroom looks much different than it did 50—or even 10—years ago. Traditional chalkboards have been replaced with digital whiteboards, and classrooms have a surplus of iPads.

Is this advancement to the detriment of your students, or does it benefit their learning? According to the Pew Research Center, 92% of teachers said that the internet has a major impact on their ability to access content, resources, and materials. Here are some of the ways educational technology improves the classroom experience:

**Creates a More Engaged Environment**

You may think technology is just a distraction, but it can help encourage active participation in your classroom. Using devices like a computer, tablet, or other type of technology in your classroom can help turn traditionally dull subjects into interactive and fun activities.

**Incorporates Different Learning Styles**

Each child in your classroom is different, and it can be challenging to adjust your learning plan to fit every student. Fortunately, technology in education can help you modify your lessons. For example, Ryan Greene, an [MS in Instructional Design and Technology](https://www.waldenu.edu/online-masters-programs/ms-in-instructional-design-and-technology) graduate, chose online learning to earn his degree at Walden, and now applies his knowledge on integrating technology to help improve his classroom.

“Kids who might want to draw during the entire class can now create an infographic to demonstrate their capabilities and understanding of the content, which I might not have previously seen or assessed,” Greene said.

His instructional design degree helped him elevate his approach in the classroom, giving students a more tailored experience that can benefit them in the future.

**Improves Collaboration**

Teachers have observed an increased frequency of students helping each other when they’re using technology in the classroom. Many technology-based tasks involve other aspects, and this leads to situations where students need to seek help from their peers or the teacher.‡ Additionally, when students are assigned to small groups, the students who are more technologically advanced can assist their inexperienced peers.

**Prepares Children for the Future**

According to a CompTIA study, nine out of 10 students indicated that using technology in the classroom would help prepare them for the digital future. By teaching students skills like PowerPoint, you can help set your students up for success. Introducing instructional technology in the classroom at a young age can help prepare students for future digital demands.

**Connects You with Your Students**

Technology can help teachers form a better relationship with their students and their colleagues. For example, 84% of teachers report using the internet at least weekly to find content that will engage students.\* Integrating technology into your lesson plans as well as using it to expand your own knowledge of subject matter can make a significant difference in the classroom.

Technology will undoubtedly continue to evolve, and it’s important to adjust your classroom style to align with its advancements. Greene offers some advice to fellow teachers: “Take the risk. Try something new. You never really know how effective a tool or approach will be until you try it. Using technology in your classroom also encourages critical thinking skills. Just dive in.”

**Source B**

Lynch, Matthew. “The Dark Side of Educational Technology.” *The Edvocate*. 15 Oct. 2016. Web. 10 Jan. 2020.

*The following is excerpted from a website for teachers.*

Can Technology Magnify Your Problems as an Educator? Yes, Yes, and Yes.

Some actions are bad enough as is. Cheating is one of those things.

Imagine how much easier it can be to cheat with the increasing use of technology.

Academic dishonesty is nothing new. As long as there have been homework assignments and tests, there have been cheaters. The way that cheating looks have changed over time, though, particularly now that technology has made it easier than ever.

And perhaps the most interesting caveat of modern-day cheating in U.S. classrooms is that students often do not think that what they are doing is wrong.

A study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics interviewed 23,000 high school students and asked them a variety of questions about academic ethics. Of the teens surveyed, 51 percent said that they had knowingly cheated at some point on an exam but that they had no qualms about the behavior. A Common Sense Media survey found that 35 percent of students had cheated via cell phone, though the parents surveyed in that particular study did not believe their kids had ever cheated. In many cases, students did not realize that tactics like looking up answers on a smartphone were cheating at all.

In today’s K-12 classrooms, students who cheat are rarely caught. There are no formulas written on in the insides of hands or students looking across the aisle, or whispering answers to their classmates. Today’s students use smartphones, tablets or even in-class computers to aid their cheating endeavors and leave no trace of their crimes. Since cheating through technology is not listed specifically as being against the rules in many school policies, students do not view the actions an unethical.

Consider the following ways that technology aids in modern-day academic dishonesty:

* Storing notes on a cell phone.
* Purchasing prewritten papers online, or ordering them to be customized.
* Writing a paper that is the same as something else found online, but changed enough to look original.
* Students text messaging each other answers.
* Using a smartphone camera to take a picture of a test or exam.
* Using voice recorders or virtual assistance programs to record or ask for answers.

Most of the tactics on this list were non-existent ten years ago, or at least the technology was not in common use by young people. A Pew Internet survey found that 78 percent of teenagers have mobile phones, up from just 23 percent in 2011. The technology is being adopted so quickly that school districts cannot adequately keep up with cheating policies, or even awareness campaigns that alert students to the problem with using technology to find answers in a certain way.

From a young age, students learn that answers exist at their fingertips through search engines and expert websites. It is more efficient to just look up the answers through the hard work someone else has already done than to find the answers on their own.

K-12 students are not the only culprits, though. When was the last time you went to the library or dug through physical records or documentation to find the answer to something? Adults take advantage of the convenience of technology all the time – even in the workplace. The difference, of course, is that most adults grew up at least partially technology-free. Today’s students will not have that life experience and instead will have learned the quickest ways to find answers – not necessarily the right ones.

Schools must develop anti-cheating policies that include technology, and those policies must be updated consistently. Teachers must stay vigilant when it comes to what their students are doing in classrooms and how technology could be playing a negative role in the learning process. Parents must also talk to their kids about the appropriate ways to find academic answers and alert them to unethical behaviors that may seem innocent in their own eyes.

**Source C**

Nagel, David. “Study: Most Teaching and Learning Uses Technology Nowadays.” *The Journal.* 10 July 2018. Web. Accessed 10 Jan. 2020.

*The following is from an article in an education journal.*

In classrooms with long-time educators, most teaching and learning involves technology. Even with assignments, less than half — 42 percent — of student work is done using paper and pencil, according to a new study conducted by MidAmerica Nazarene University.

The study involved 1,000 K–12 teachers who've been in the profession for a minimum of five years. It found that teachers are overwhelmingly positive about technology in the classroom, with 66 percent saying it makes students more productive and 60 percent saying it stimulates them more intellectually. A full 82 percent said technology tools "have not only brought the classroom into the modern age, but they have also enhanced learning and teaching."

Other findings from the survey included:

* 73 percent of teachers said their students use tablets or laptops daily.
* 66 percent of of respondents said the school supplies the device, with 25 percent saying students bring the devices themselves. (The remainder said their schools don't permit laptops or tablets.)
* 86 percent of teachers have WiFi in their classrooms.
* 62 percent said students use their own technology in the classroom.
* 70 percent said phones cause "tension and disruptions in the classroom."
* Typical rules for phone use include silencing them and putting them away during exams.
* 36 percent said they deal with phone disruptions on a daily basis.
* 61 percent said tech makes students physically less active.
* 38 percent said tech makes students more social, with 36 percent saying it makes them less social. The remainder said it has no effect.

**Source D**

Johnson, Steven. *Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way We Create and Communicate.* New York: Basic, 1999. Print.

*The following is an excerpt in which the author reflects on his early experience using a computer.*

Fast-forward a decade or two, and I can’t imagine writing without a computer. Even jotting down a note with pen and paper feels strained. . . . I have to think about writing, *think* about it consciously as my hand scratches out the words on the page, think about the act itself. There is none of the easy flow of the word processor, just a kind of drudgery, running against the thick grain of habit. Pen and paper feel profoundly different to me now—they have the air of an inferior technology about them, the sort of contraption well suited for jotting down a phone number, but not much beyond that. Writing an entire book by hand strikes me as being a little like filming Citizen Kane with a camcorder. You can make a go at it, of course, but on some fundamental level you’ve misjudged the appropriate scale of the technology you’re using. It sounds appalling, I know, but there it is. I’m a typer, not a writer. Even my handwriting is disintegrating, becoming less and less my handwriting, and more the erratic, anonymous scrawl of someone learning to write for the first time.

I accept this condition gladly, and at the same time I can recall the predigital years of my childhood, writing stories by hand into loose-leaf notebooks, practicing my cursive strokes and then surveying the loops and descenders, seeing something there that looked like me, my sense of selfhood scrawled onto the page. On a certain level these two mental states are totally incompatible—bits versus atoms—but the truth is I have no trouble reconciling them. My “written” self has always fed back powerfully into my normal, walking-around-doing-more-or-less-nothing self. When I was young that circuit was completed by tools of ink and paper; today it belongs to the zeros and ones. The basic shape of the circuit is unchanged.

**Source E**

Wexler, Natalie. “How Classroom Technology Is Holding Students Back.” *MIT Technology Review*. 19 Dec. 2019. Web. Accessed 10 Jan. 2020.

*The following is excerpted from an article about the use of technology in schools.*

Schools across the country have jumped on the education technology bandwagon in recent years, with the encouragement of technophile philanthropists like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. As older education reform strategies like school choice and attempts to improve teacher quality have failed to bear fruit, educators have pinned their hopes on the idea that instructional software and online tutorials and games can help narrow the massive test-score gap between students at the top and bottom of the socioeconomic scale. A recent Gallup report found that 89% of students in the United States (from third to 12th grade) say they use digital learning tools in school at least a few days a week.

Gallup also found near-universal enthusiasm for technology on the part of educators. Among administrators and principals, 96% fully or somewhat support “the increased use of digital learning tools in their school,” with almost as much support (85%) coming from teachers. But it’s not clear this fervor is based in evidence. When asked if “there is a lot of information available about the effectiveness” of the digital tools they used, only 18% of administrators said yes, along with about a quarter of teachers and principals. Another quarter of teachers said they had little or no information.

In fact, the evidence is equivocal at best. Some studies have found positive effects, at least from moderate amounts of computer use, especially in math. But much of the data shows a negative impact at a range of grade levels. A study of millions of high school students in the 36 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that those who used computers heavily at school “do a lot worse in most learning outcomes, even after accounting for social background and student demographics.” According to other studies, college students in the US who used laptops or digital devices in their classes did worse on exams. Eighth graders who took Algebra I online did much worse than those who took the course in person. And fourth graders who used tablets in all or almost all their classes had, on average, reading scores 14 points lower than those who never used them—a differential equivalent to an entire grade level. In some states, the gap was significantly larger.

A 2019 report from the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado on personalized learning—a loosely defined term that is largely synonymous with education technology—issued a sweeping condemnation. It found “questionable educational assumptions embedded in influential programs, self-interested advocacy by the technology industry, serious threats to student privacy, and a lack of research support.”

Judging from the evidence, the most vulnerable students can be harmed the most by a heavy dose of technology—or, at best, not helped. The OECD study found that “technology is of little help in bridging the skills divide between advantaged and disadvantaged students.” In the United States, the test score gap between students who use technology frequently and those who don’t is largest among students from low-income families. A similar effect has been found for “flipped” courses, which have students watch lectures at home via technology and use class time for discussion and problem-solving. A flipped college math class resulted in short-term gains for white students, male students, and those who were already strong in math. Others saw no benefit, with the result that performance gaps became wider.

Even more troubling, there’s evidence that vulnerable students are spending more time on digital devices than their more privileged counterparts. High school students in questionable online “credit recovery” courses are disproportionately likely to be poor or members of minority groups (or both). “Virtual” charter schools—which offer online classes and generally produce dismal results—often enroll struggling students. A national charter network called Rocketship Public Schools, which serves low-income communities, relies heavily on technology, with even students in kindergarten spending 80 to 100 minutes a day in front of screens. One study found that in schools serving relatively affluent populations, 44% of fourth graders never used computers, compared with 34% in poorer areas….

Educators and reformers aiming to advance educational equity also need to consider the mounting evidence of technology’s flaws. Much attention has been focused on the so-called digital divide—the relative lack of access that lower-income Americans have to technology and the internet. That’s legitimate: Kevin and students like him need to learn how to use computers to access information online and, more generally, to navigate the modern world. But let’s not create a digital divide of the opposite kind by outsourcing their education to devices that purport to build “skills” while their peers in richer neighborhoods enjoy the benefits of being taught by human beings.

**Source F**

Boligan, Angel. Cartoon. *El Universal* [Mexico City]. Cagle Cartoons, 9 Jan. 2008. Web. 17 Aug. 2009.

*The following is a cartoon commentary.*



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